

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Re: Expanding the Definition of High Impact Areas for the Provider
 Relief Fund

Dear Secretary Azar:

I would like to thank you for your work in developing a methodology for distributing the Provider Relief Fund. We are in unprecedented times, and the Department of Health and Human Services has the daunting task of rapidly distributing funding for our frontline providers in an equitable manner that meets the needs of our country.

As you know, Congress appropriated \$100 billion in the CARES Act to HHS for the Provider Relief Fund, and after allocating an initial \$30 billion to providers on April 10th, HHS released its plan for the remaining \$70 billion on April 22nd. In this plan, HHS announced its intention of allocating \$10 billion for high impact areas in the country that have borne a disproportionate share of the nation's COVID-19 cases. In order to receive an allotment from this \$10 billion, a hospital must meet a number of requirements, including reporting the total number of positive COVID-19 patients at the hospital through April 10th.

The sharp cut off for April 10th causes concern for states like Ohio that have begun to deal with unexpected spikes in cases of COVID-19 in just the past few days. Ohio's new hotspots revolve around two state prisons in Pickaway County and Marion County that have seen outbreaks of COVID-19 that are driving an exponential increase in new cases for the state and account for two of the largest sources of COVID-19 in the country.

The State of Ohio has designated The Ohio State University's Wexner Medical Center to care for all inmates in the state, due to the high quality of care that they provide and their capacity and infrastructure to hold these types of patients. Although I believe in the Wexner Medical Center's ability to meet any challenge, these unprecedented times are testing the financial strength of our nation's health care institutions, and providers like those at The Ohio State University need additional resources and support to combat this new surge in cases.

As you know, prison populations are highly susceptible to these kinds of outbreaks, due to the vulnerable populations in the prisons and the congregate nature of the prisons themselves. Thus, as we continue to respond to this evolving challenge, I respectfully request that you consider expanding the definition of high impact areas to account for outbreaks occurring after April 10th and for hospitals like The Wexner Medical Center that are caring for our nation's prisoners affected by this crisis.

I appreciate your consideration of this issue and thank you for your work to support our nation's health care providers during this time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rob Portman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rob Portman
United States Senator